



SUBJECT

cc. Taster set.

Ireland: Meetings with the Taoiseach Pk3.

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

23 October, 1980.

Dear Roy,

Message from the Taoiseach

As you know, the Irish Ambassador called on the Prime Minister this afternoon to deliver the enclosed message from the Taoiseach to the Prime Minister about the threatened hunger strike at the Maze Prison. Dr. Kennedy emphasised that the Irish Government did not propose to reveal the fact that a message had been sent.

Dr. Kennedy said that Mr. Haughey was deeply concerned about the dangers posed by the strike. Mr. Haughey thought that his Government had made considerable progress on the security front. Subversives in the Irish Republic had become isolated and demoralised. This had been made possible by the degree of public support enjoyed by the Government. That support might well be shaken by a prolonged hunger strike. Moreover the strike might well result in the revival of the flow of funds and arms from the United States. The Irish Government had had ample experience of the effects of hunger strikes. They feared that the consequences of an H Block hunger strike could only be damaging.

The Prime Minister said that she greatly appreciated the efforts which had been made in every quarter to tackle the security problem. She and her colleagues valued what had been achieved. They were also aware of the possible consequences of a hunger strike. It was with both points in mind that the Cabinet had that morning held a prolonged discussion of its policy towards the hunger strike. They had in the end decided to make the major gesture of allowing prisoners in Northern Ireland to wear civilian clothes instead of prison uniform. It had not been an easy decision. She hoped that the prisoners in the Maze would recognise that one of their major demands had been met, and would call off the hunger strike. She also hoped that Cardinal O'Fiaich would feel able to offer his full cooperation in the effort to avert the strike.

Dr. Kennedy warmly welcomed what the Prime Minister had said (which obviously came as news to him). He said that he was sure the Taoiseach also would be highly appreciative. He was confident

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that his Government would urge Cardinal O'Fiaich to use his influence against the strike. It would obviously now be far more difficult for the men who were "on the blanket" to pursue their plans.

I am sending copies of this letter and its enclosure to Paul Lever (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Roy Harrington, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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